4.3 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

4.3.1 Environmental Setting

The city of Carlsbad includes approximately 6.5 miles of high quality beaches that are intensively used by residents and visitors and highly regarded for their aesthetics/visual resources values. Many additional high quality beaches are located on the 48-mile long coastline south of the city of Carlsbad, and collectively these San Diego County beaches are important aesthetics/visual resources that are viewed by millions of residents and visitors annually. The beaches are an important element of the quality of life in southern California.

The proposed Project would be reconstructed on a portion of Carlsbad State Beach, which extends about a mile to the north of the Project site (North Beach), and 1.5 miles to the south (Middle Beach and South Beach). South of Carlsbad State Beach is South Carlsbad State Beach. Residents and visitors can view these beaches from homes, hotels, restaurants, businesses, sidewalks, and roads. Many residents and visitors carry out daily or weekly beach activities and are sensitive to changes in aesthetics/visual resources characteristics. Carlsbad Boulevard runs the length of the beaches within the city of Carlsbad. Most residences, hotels, restaurants, and businesses are located along and east of Carlsbad Boulevard, to the north of the Project site, adjacent to North Beach. There are fewer residences and little commercial activity along Carlsbad Avenue to the south of the Project site, since most of the property there is taken up by the Station. However, there are substantial numbers of travelers on Carlsbad Boulevard in this area, along with people who stop to engage in beach activities or stop at Cannon Park, which is located at the corner of Carlsbad Boulevard and Cannon Road. The beaches are also visible from the water and many residents and visitors engage in water sports, including surfing and boating.

Some of the most scenic and utilized beaches occur within 5 miles of the proposed Project, south of Carlsbad and north of Point La Jolla. Collectively, beaches in the city of Carlsbad and San Diego County are valued for being beautiful, sandy, and wide. Substantial public attention typically focuses on maintaining wide, sandy beaches.

4.3.2 Regulatory Setting

Several adopted plans contain policies and/or objectives that seek to protect the scenic and visual quality of beaches in the city of Carlsbad, as follows.

The Visual Resources and Historic Preservation section of the Agua Hedionda Land Use Plan (AHLUP) contains the following relevant policies related to aesthetics:

- "30251. The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas."

The City of Carlsbad General Plan identifies the City's beaches as "Environmentally Sensitive Lands'' and "open space lands which are constrained or prohibited from development.'' The General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element identifies the beaches as citywide priority resources under "Category 1 Open Space for Preservation of Natural Resources.'' In addition, the General Plan includes a policy to:

- "Protect and conserve natural resources, fragile ecological areas, unique natural assets and historically significant features of the community."

The City's beaches are considered natural resources and unique natural assets. Two other relevant General Plan policies are as follows:

- "Participate in programs that restore and enhance the City's degraded natural resources;" and
- "Pursue mitigation measures which address the causes of beach sand erosion."

As such, the City of Carlsbad General Plan includes policies that seek to preserve and enhance City beaches. Activities that adversely affect the quality of City beaches, including those reducing beach width, would conflict with the General Plan, while activities increasing beach width would be consistent with the General Plan policies.

The Mello II Local Coastal Plan contains policies on visual access and site development reviews, as follows.

- "Policy 7-11 Visual Access—Visual access over more than 80 percent of the Carlsbad coastline is unobstructed because of public ownership. No future public improvements which would obstruct this visual access shall be permitted."
- "Policy 8-1 Site Development Review—The Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone should be applied where necessary throughout the Carlsbad coastal zone to

assure the maintenance of existing views and panoramas. Sites considered for development should undergo individual review to determine if the proposed development will obstruct views or otherwise damage the visual beauty of the area…"

4.3.3 Significance Criteria

The following criteria were used to determine whether impacts would be considered significant. The evaluation is posed as a question, as follows.

Would the implementation of the proposed actions:

- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway; or
- Conflict with other Federal, State, or local visual or aesthetic plans or policies.

4.3.4 Impact Analysis and Mitigation

The effects of the proposed Project and the physical presence of the extended jetty were evaluated and discussed in Section 4.1.4, Impact Analysis and Mitigation. These were determined to be Class III impacts, and no mitigation is required. This section of the EIR evaluates the potential for the proposed Project to cause changes in beach width along about 1 mile of beaches within the city of Carlsbad.

Impact VIS-1: Beach Width Reduction on Middle Beach and South Beach

Potential short- and long-term increases in erosion causing decreased beach width for about 1 mile south of the northern inlet jetty (Class II).

Beaches are important aesthetics/visual resources in the city of Carlsbad and along the San Diego County coastline, and maintaining beach width is important in preserving aesthetic and visual resource quality. The sensitive receptors include a large number of residents, visitors, beach users, and passersby, virtually all of whom place substantial value on beach aesthetics/visual resource quality. More than 126,000 visitors per

month have been recorded by the State Department of Parks and Recreation at city of Carlsbad beaches.

If the proposed Project functions as designed, or if artificial infilling is required to assure bypassing, approximately 1 mile of the Carlsbad State Beach north of the Project site could become wider. The widening would be most pronounced immediately adjacent to the extended jetty, where the beach could become as much as about 400 feet wider than the present width of about 200 feet. The widening would become less pronounced toward the north, with none occurring at Christiansen Way. Beach widening is considered a beneficial aesthetics/visual resources effect, and is consistent with the policies and objectives of multiple adopted plans for the City of Carlsbad, County of San Diego, and the region. Therefore, the Project-related widening of Carlsbad State Beach is considered a Class IV beneficial impact.

If the proposed Project functions as designed, beaches on approximately 1 mile of coastline south of the Project site could be reduced in width. The most pronounced reduction in width could occur close to the Project site at Middle Beach, becoming less pronounced with distance and having no effect at about Cannon Road. The amount of beach narrowing was not quantified, but the existing jetty has caused a reduction of width at Middle Beach of about 65 percent when compared with its pre-construction condition in 1947. South Beach has lost about 35 percent of its width in 1947. This reduction in width has occurred despite periodic sand replenishment by the Applicant. The extension of the existing jetty by 200 feet would potentially exacerbate this existing problem. A substantial reduction in width of Middle Beach and South Beach would have significant impacts upon the aesthetics/visual resource quality of the beach and would be noticeable by hundreds of thousands of sensitive receptors each month. Reductions in the widths of Middle Beach and South Beach would also conflict with the policies contained in multiple adopted plans that seek to protect and preserve the scenic vistas and visual qualities of the City of Carlsbad coastline.

For these reasons, reductions in the width of Middle Beach and South Beach are considered Class II impacts and mitigation is necessary to reduce these impacts to below the significance criteria. Artificial replenishment of beach sand would be required to maintain 2001 beach widths on Middle Beach and South Beach.

Mitigation Measure for Impact VIS-1: Beach Width Reduction on Middle Beach and South Beach

MM VIS-1: Implement Mitigation Measure MM WQ-2.

Rationale for Mitigation

Restoring the widths of Middle Beach and South Beach to the widths that were existing when the NOP was circulated for the proposed Project would assure existing conditions are not substantially changed by the Project. The use of bathymetry from the back of the beach to a water depth of 45 feet is necessary to assure any substantial changes in beach width are related to a reduction in longshore transport and are not due to seasonal variability. That is, substantial reductions in beach width and reductions in the volume of sand present offshore would confirm the need for sand replenishment.

4.3.5 Impacts of Alternatives

No Project Alternative

The No Project Alternative would avoid the potential impacts to beach width and therefore would avoid aesthetics/visual resources impacts of the proposed Project. The Project objective of decreasing the frequency of dredging in Agua Hedionda Lagoon would not be achieved.

Reduced Maintenance Dredging Alternative

The Alternative would avoid the potential impacts to beach width and therefore would avoid the aesthetics/visual resources-related impacts of the proposed Project. The Project objective of decreasing the frequency of dredging in Agua Hedionda Lagoon would not be achieved, but the volume of material annual dredged would be reduced and the alternative would satisfy the underlying desire of the Applicant to reduce capital expenditures related to maintenance dredging.

Offshore Water Intake Structure/Cessation of Lagoon Maintenance Dredging Alternative

This alternative would avoid the additional long-term impacts to beaches and therefore would avoid aesthetics/visual resources impacts of the proposed Project. There would be aesthetic/visual resources impacts during the construction of the offshore intake structure. These would be short-lived and involve a limited number of vessels and equipment, and would therefore be considered Class III impacts and no mitigation would be necessary. This alternative would achieve the Project objective of decreasing the frequency of lagoon dredging.

4.3.6 Cumulative Projects Impact Analysis

Both the SANDAG Regional Beach Sand Project and the proposed Project would continue periodic disposal of beach sand upcoast of the proposed Project, which would have the potential to increase the width of the beach north of the upcoast jetty. The amount of beach sand deposited by the Applicant following completion of the proposed Project is expected to be reduced since the extended jetty is designed to reduce the frequency and amount of maintenance dredging. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect, if any, would be an augmentation of the beach and a reduced conflict with adopted plans and policies that favor maintenance of wider beaches. Neither of these projects, as currently proposed, targets Middle Beach or South Beach, and therefore neither would likely reduce cumulative impacts to a less-than-significant level. However, if approved, the proposed Project will include mitigation that obligates the Applicant, as necessary, to maintain Middle and South beaches at 2001 widths, which would mitigate this potentially significant cumulative impact (Class II).

Implemented in 2001, the SANDAG Regional Beach Sand Project increased beach width at North Beach by 11 feet to 27 feet close to the existing northern inlet jetty, and by 60 feet at the northern-most extent of Carlsbad State Beach (see Appendix C). The Applicant's disposal of sand at North Beach may also have contributed to this increase in width. The SANDAG project had no lasting effect on the widths of Middle Beach or South Beach.